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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0507

RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0243

RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 1780

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 6618

RUEUITH/AFOSI 52 FIS ANKARA TU PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001745

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: EG PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PARTNERS BUT NOT PALS WITH EGYPT

REF: ANKARA 1717

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Both the Turkish MFA and Egyptian Embassy view the bilateral relationship positively for now, but the two countries' wariness towards each other could impact relations down the road. The Turkish MFA says it views Egypt as a partner and not a competitor. The Egyptian Embassy commented that Turkey will never be able to compete with Cairo because of Turkey's linguistic and cultural distance from the Arab world. Turkish academics, however, view Turkey as increasing its foreign policy influence against a perceived waning Egypt. Turkey will be hard pressed to capitalize on its recent foreign policy success at Egypt's expense because much depends on external factors, such as Egyptian internal dynamics and Ankara toeing the line on relations with Syria and Iran. END SUMMARY.

High Point in Relations

¶2. (C) Turkey and Egypt seem to be on a positive trajectory in bilateral relations. We met recently with MFA First Secretary Burak Rende on bilateral relations in late October, who emphasized that Turkey and Egypt continue to have good relations-- particularly since the two countries have a strategic partnership and Cairo helped Turkey enter the Arab League in 2007. However, Rende commented that the relationship is not as strong as Turkey would like considering the strategic partnership, but that Ankara hopes it will improve with time.

¶3. (C) The Egyptian Embassy, for its part, commented that bilateral relations are the best they have ever been. Seyfi Tashan, President of the Foreign Policy Institute, and Egyptian Embassy Second Secretary Ihab Soliman both highlighted that bilateral trade has grown significantly. According to them, trade between the two countries was roughly \$2.4 billion as of August, of which Turkish exports represented \$1.98 billion. This is a dramatic shift compared to 2007, when both imports and exports only accounted for \$500-600 million. Moreover, Soliman commented that Turkey's increasing foreign policy role is positive for Cairo because Ankara has tried to be constructive in Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. Turkey's expanding outreach to Egypt and in the region can be seen in other unexpected parts of the world as

well -- including Africa and Latin America with the establishment of new embassies and increased trade. Egypt sees this as a more independent, mature Turkish foreign policy, a "semi-power of sorts," for which the Embassy said Foreign Minister Davutoglu created the recipe.

Turkey: Possible Competitor to Egypt?

¶ 4. (C) The Turkish MFA said that Turkey views Egypt as a "partner" in the region and does not see any competition despite public reports to the contrary. Rende commented that Ankara consciously tries not to step on Cairo's toes because it values its relationship with Egypt, and Egypt's position in the region. However, Turkey is trying to increase its influence by "reconnecting" or opening new ties with various countries. Soliman said that Turkey and Egypt can work in "parallel" because Ankara will never be able to compete with Egypt in the Arab world. He relayed that Turkey is barely trying to resume relations after nearly a 90-year absence since World War I, whereas Egypt helped form the Arab world culturally, linguistically, and with nation-building. Soliman also contended that Cairo would never be replaced as the "cultural center" of the Arab world.

¶ 5. (C) Yet Turkish academics contend that Egypt is losing influence in the region, giving Turkey the opportunity to increase its clout. The Turkish Foreign Policy Institute said that Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu enjoy increased influence and popularity on the Arab street due to Turkey's post-Gaza anti-Israel rhetoric, stable economy, and AKP's Islamist slant. Moreover, they

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said, Turkey can be an impartial broker with countries such as Israel and Syria. The Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM), however, said street appeal does not necessarily translate into support with Middle Eastern decision-makers. Indeed, Soliman told us his government was angered when Erdogan's anti-Israeli criticism during and after the December-January Gaza intervention generated pressure in the Egyptian street and media for more explicit official condemnation of Israel.

Possible Problems Down the Road

¶ 6. (C) Looking ahead, Rende commented that the relationship could be adversely affected by Turkey's policy of engagement with its neighbors. He specifically mentioned Syria since Davutoglu's policy is that there cannot be peace in the Middle East without Syria. Rende stressed that Turkey has to engage Syria because the two countries share a border and Ankara's policy is dialogue. He said that Turkey, for its part, is trying to engage, lobbying Syria to be constructive with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the region. However, he recognizes that Syria and Egypt are on two different pages, which could be a problem in future Turkish-Egyptian relations.

¶ 7. (C) Rende said that Turkey also disagrees with Egypt on Israel, particularly regarding the Gaza crisis, which could erupt again and negatively impact relations. Rende said that Turkey, for now, is taking a backseat and letting Egypt take the lead on Israel. However, Rende commented that politics could become a future factor, implying that Turkey may feel obliged to vie for the lead. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Embassy dismissively suggested that Ankara may be over its head on Israel.

¶ 8. (C) The Egyptian Embassy also commented that Egypt does not see Turkey shifting to the East, contrary to many recent media commentaries, because Ankara's roots are firmly in NATO. The Turkish Foreign Policy Institute ORSAM too said Ankara's EU aspirations keep Turkey grounded.

Comment

¶ 9. (C) While on the surface Turkey-Egypt relations appear cordial and healthy enough, some of the biting commentary from the Egyptian Embassy shows the far more negative undercurrents. We hear similar skeptical comments from other Arab diplomats about Ankara's aspirations to be a player in the Middle East. Turkey's outreach to Syria and increasingly harsh rhetoric against Israel are generating mutual wariness. Even so, Ankara's continuing search for markets seems likely to draw its diplomatic attention further into the Arab world.

Silliman

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